

Importance of Concept " *Pathya*" In *Ayurveda*: A Comparative Analysis of Ayurvedic *Dhatu-Poshana Nyayas*

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Abstract

Background: Classical *Ayurvedic* physiology conceptualizes human nutrition through a holistic, elemental framework that governs tissue synthesis and systemic homeostasis. Central to this paradigm is the *Panchabhautik* constitution of matter and the sequential nourishment of the seven fundamental bodily tissues (*Saptadhatu*).

Objective: This paper provides a structured scientific analysis of dietary regulation (*Pathya*) in *Ayurveda*. It delineates the functional differences between nutritive substances (*Ahara Dravya*) and medicinal substances (*Aushadha Dravya*), and evaluates the four classical mechanisms of tissue nourishment (*Dhatu-Poshana Nyaya*) through the lens of modern physiological processes.

Conclusion: The classical analogies—*Kedari-Kulya*, *Kshira-Dadhi*, *Khala-Kapotanya*, and *Ekakala*—are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they represent a sophisticated, multi-faceted understanding of macro-fluid dynamics, metabolic biotransformation, receptor-mediated cellular selectivity, and continuous parallel perfusion.

Introduction: The *Panchabhautik* Framework of Nutrition

Ayurvedic physiology operates on the foundational axiom that both the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (the human organism) are *Panchabhautik*—composed of the five primordial elements:

- Space (*Akash*)
- Air (*Vayu*)
- Fire (*Teja*)
- Water (*Jala*)
- Earth (*Prithvi*)

To maintain systemic homeostasis and prevent cellular degradation, the human body requires regular replenishment from external sources that share this identical elemental configuration. Therefore, dietary

regulation (*Pathya*) is not merely a lifestyle choice but a strict physiological necessity to ensure that the ingested *Panchabhautik* fractions match the structural and functional requirements of the organism's tissues.

1. Classification of Ingested Substances: *Ahara* vs. *Aushadha*

Ayurveda categorizes oral intake based on primary physiological outcomes, distinguishing sharply between structural nourishment and metabolic modulation.

1.1 *Ahara Dravya* (Nutritive Substances)

Ahara dravyas (e.g., *Vrihi* / rice, *Godhuma* / wheat) are classified as *Rasa-pradhana* (taste-dominant). Their primary role is the macro-nutritive replenishment of bodily tissues. Upon gastrointestinal digestion (*Jatharagni paka*), these substances transform into a homogenous, nutrient-dense chyle (*Ahara Rasa*). Secondary physicochemical properties, such as thermal potency (*Virya*), are subordinate to this primary volume-expanding and tissue-building function.

1.2 *Aushadha Dravya* (Medicinal Substances)

Conversely, *Aushadha dravyas* (e.g., *Suntha* / dry ginger, *Mire* / black pepper, *Pimpali* / long pepper) are *Veerya-pradhana* (potency-dominant). These substances express distinct thermal profiles—either hot (*Ushna*) or cold (*Sheeta*). Their primary mechanism of action is the modulation of metabolic fire (*Agni*) and the clearance of micro-channels (*Srotas*), rather than direct structural integration into the tissue matrices (*Dhatus*).

Attribute: *Ahara Dravya* (Nutritive) *Aushadha Dravya* (Medicinal)

Primary Dominance *Rasa* (Taste/Nutritive Fluid): *Virya* (Potency/Bioactivity)

Core Function: Tissue nourishment and growth Metabolic and *doshic* modulation

Impact on *Dhatus*: Direct structural replenishment Indirect functional optimization

Examples Rice (*Vrihi*), Wheat (*Godhuma*) Dry Ginger (*Sunth*), Black Pepper (*Mire*)

2. Constitutional Framework of the *Saptadhatus*

In contrast to contemporary anatomy, which categorizes structural systems by distinct histological types (e.g., epithelial, connective, muscular, nervous), classical *Ayurveda* models the human body into seven sequential tissue elements (*Saptadhatus*). These are governed by the principle *dehadharana dhatava*—the tissues that structurally uphold and sustain life.

Rasa (Chyle/Plasma): The primary fluid vector carrying bio-available nutrients.

Rakta (Blood cells): The vehicle for oxygenation and vitalization.

Mamsa (Muscle tissue): The physical covering and voluntary locomotive apparatus.

Meda (Adipose tissue): The lipid matrix providing lubrication and insulation.

Asthi (Osseous tissue): The supportive framework and skeletal structure.

Majja (Myeloid/Nervous tissue): The internal bone marrow filling and neural communication network.

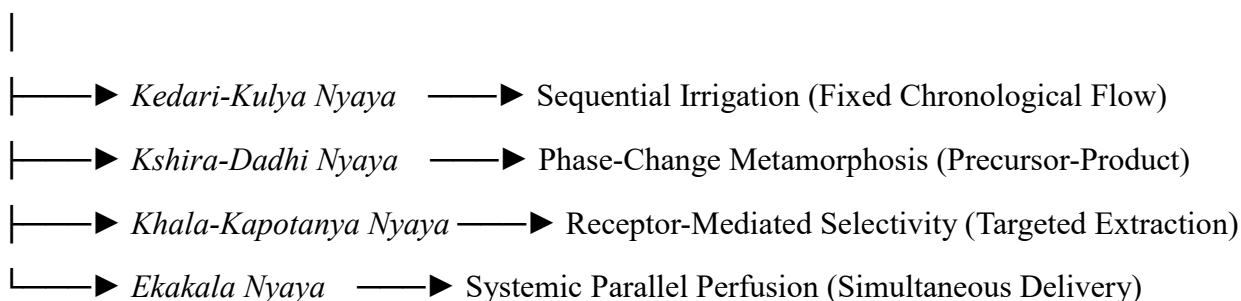
Shukra (Reproductive tissue/Gametes): The ultimate essence responsible for procreation and cellular vitality.

The structural integrity of every downstream tissue depends completely on the quality of *Ahara Rasa* generated during initial digestion.

3. Mechanisms of Tissue Nourishment (*Dhatu-Poshana Nyaya*)

To explain how a single, un-differentiated precursor fluid (*Ahara Rasa*) successfully builds and sustains seven distinct, highly specialized tissue matrices, classical authorities developed four core physiological models (*Nyayas*).

[*Ahara Rasa* (Nutrient Chyle)]



3.1 *Kedari-Kulya Nyaya* (The Irrigation-Channel Analogy)

Classical Postulate: This model compares nutrient distribution to an agricultural irrigation network. Water flows through a main channel into sequential fields; the first field absorbs its required volume before the surplus cascades down to adjacent plots (*Sushruta Samhita, Sutrasthana 14/12*).

Modern Physiological Paradigm: This describes the macro-fluid dynamics of the circulatory system. Nutrients travel via fixed anatomical vascular tracks (*Srotas*), establishing a chronological progression of metabolic delivery based on vascular distance and circulation times.

3.2 *Kshira-Dadhi Nyaya* (The Milk-to-Curd Transformation Analogy)

Classical Postulate: This principle mirrors the irreversible, phase-change metamorphosis of milk into curd, which can then be churned into butter and clarified into ghee. It posits that *Rasa Dhatu* undergoes an absolute, linear biotransformation to become *Rakta*, which then mutates into *Mamsa*, continuing down the lineage to *Shukra*.

Modern Physiological Paradigm: This aligns with precursor-product metabolic pathways and cellular differentiation lineages. It behaves similarly to haematopoiesis, where uncommitted stem cells undergo irreversible step-by-step differentiation into highly specialized mature cell lines.

3.3 *Khala-Kapotanya Nyaya* (The Selectivity/Pigeon-Granary Analogy)

Classical Postulate: This principle suggests that individual tissues behave like pigeons picking specific grains from a communal threshing floor. Each *Dhatu* independently and autonomously extracts its specific required nutritional fractions from the shared circulating pool of *Ahara Rasa*.

Modern Physiological Paradigm: This serves as a classical description of receptor-mediated endocytosis, cellular affinity, and target-tissue selectivity. Cells express specific surface receptors to pull exact ligands, ions, or macronutrients from systemic circulation, independent of neighbouring tissues.

3.4 *Ekakala Dhatu-Poshana Nyaya* (The Principle of Simultaneous Nourishment)

Classical Postulate: This model asserts that the circulatory apparatus distributes nutritive fluid through the macro- and micro-channels simultaneously, supplying all tissue networks concurrently without a chronological delay.

Modern Physiological Paradigm: This corresponds directly to systemic arterial perfusion. Once macronutrients enter the aorta, the high-pressure cardiovascular apparatus ensures parallel distribution to all organ systems simultaneously, maintaining continuous basal cellular nutrition.

4. Discussion and Synthesis

Rather than viewing these four classical Nyayas as competing theories, integrative physiology must view them as complementary descriptions of a multi-tiered circulatory and metabolic architecture.

Ekakala Nyaya and *Kedari-Kulya Nyaya* explain the macro-transport dynamics—how blood pressure and vascular networks ensure immediate, continuous, and sequential fluid flow across the body.

Khala-Kapotanya Nyaya and *Kshira-Dadhi Nyaya* explain the micro-metabolic dynamics—governing how individual cells select nutrients at the capillary interface and how those nutrients undergo enzymatic conversion into specialized cellular structures.

Based on the principle "वृद्धिः समानैः सर्वेषाम्" (Increase is caused by similar attributes), the consumption of substances dominant in a specific Mahabhuta (element) leads to the increased nourishment of that exact same Mahabhuta within the body. This means that if you consume substances dominant in the Prithvi (Earth) element, the nourishment of bodily elements (*Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala*) containing the Earth element will be higher compared to the other four elements. This happens because the *Tridosha* themselves are composed of the *Panchamahabhutas* (five basic elements). For example: *Vata Dosha*: Composed of *Akasha* (Space) and *Vayu* (Air) elements. *Pitta Dosha*: Composed of *Agni* (Fire) and *Jala* (Water) elements. *Kapha Dosha*: Composed of *Prithvi* (Earth) and *Jala* (Water) elements. Similarly, taking wheat as a food example, if it is consumed continuously for a long time, it will increase the nourishment of the *Prithvi* element in the body. This is because wheat possesses *Madhura* (sweet), *Snigdha* (unctuous/oily), and *Guru* (heavy) properties. Consequently, this will increase diseases caused by *Kapha Dosha*. It is precisely for this reason that avoiding diet and lifestyle factors (*Ahar-Vihar*) that aggravate *Kapha* is advised. Conversely, the diet and lifestyle that reduce *Kapha* are considered *Pathya* (wholesome/beneficial).

पथं पथोऽनपेतं यद्यच्योक्तं मनसः प्रियम्।

यच्चाप्रियपथं च नियतं तन्न लक्षयेत् ॥ (च.सू. २५ / ४५)

That which is beneficial, wholesome or suitable for the body and mind. Which does not cause any obstruction in any Audi channel and which is also pleasing or soothing to the mind and on the contrary, which causes blockages hands the body channels and is unpleasant to the mind.

And hence it is also said that

पथे सति गदार्तस्य किमौषधि निषेवणैः ।

The one who follows wholesome diet does not need any medicine. And who does not follow wholesome diet, medicine is of no use.

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6. Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest regarding the publication of manuscript

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